



Election Modernization Committee

Date: **October 22, 2019**

Time: **7:30-9:00pm**

Location: **Lyons Meeting Room, Town Hall 2nd Floor**

Minutes

Attendance: Adam Badik, Paul Czech, Greg Dennis, Walter Horn, James O'Connor, Maxwell Palmer, Jennifer Susse.

1. Administrative Issues

Jim informed us that, according to Town Counsel Heim, we are subject to the Open Meeting Law. As such, we can continue to forward information by email, but we can't discuss that information as a quorum. Jennifer added that while 1:1 discussions are permissible, we should even be careful with those, because serial 1:1 discussions (A talks to B, B talks to C, etc) that ultimately transmits a discussion between a quorum would be a violation of Open Meeting Law.

Jim informed us that our initial report was sent to the Select Board, but there was no acknowledgement of the receipt of their report in their communications. He's also trying to setup a committee page on the town website for us, to provide a home for our agendas and minutes, which currently require finding our meeting entries on the town calendar and clicking on the linked documents from there.

Greg motioned to approve the minutes from the meeting on September 19. Jim seconded. Greg, Max, and Walter voted yes; Adam abstained.

2. Envision Arlington Survey Questions

We began a discussion of what questions we should write for the Envision Arlington survey. Juli Brazile from Envision Arlington had emailed guidelines for the questions to a few committee members earlier in the day. During the meeting, Greg forwarded those guidelines to the rest of the committee.

Max said open-ended questions that allow respondents to report their own issues with voting may work better than questions that "suggest" issues to voters. He added that we could split issues into two questions: one that asks whether the issue is important to you (e.g. "how important is parking availability at your polling place?") and another that grade's Arlington's

performance on that issue ("how available is parking at your polling place?"). That would help ensure we address issues that both offer room for improvement and are of a high priority. Lastly, he suggested questions that asked whether the respondent voted in recent elections.

Walter suggested polling the popularity of particular policy decisions, e.g. the idea of lowering the voting age for local elections. Others expressed agreement.

Paul recommended adding questions about disabilities to the survey. For example, we could ask whether a disability has ever prevented you from voting and what disability that would be (sight, mobility, etc). He later retracted the idea of identifying one's individual disability, because people can feel skittish about doing so. It might be better to ask what kind of difficulties they face voting rather than individual conditions. Paul then read us a letter from Darcy Devney, another member of the Disability Commission.

Greg proposed phrasing a question like "Have you had difficulty voting for any of the following reasons: (a) no public transit to the polling place, (b) couldn't park at the polling place, (c) didn't know about the election, (d) inconvenient poll hours, (e) mobility difficulty entering the poll, (f) difficulty reading the ballot, (g) lines were too long, etc."

Greg asked Paul whether the Disability Commission might be interested in adding survey questions about the general accessibility of the town independent of election issues. Paul said that might be a good idea and would investigate it. Paul said he would look into the possibility of EMC members attending a meeting of the Disability Commission where joint concerns could be discussed.

Adam said that the list of issues may be different for different elections. For example, polling hours may be a bigger issue during primaries and local elections, when early voting is not available. Max said that could potentially be addressed by using a grid with elections on the left-hand side and issues along the top. Jennifer said that may get too complicated, because people would forget which issues they had on which date. Paul agreed and preferred Greg's formulation where the respondent can just check off all the difficulties they experienced.

Jennifer liked the idea of asking "did you vote in any of the following elections?" followed by a list of recent elections.

Walter said we may want to phrase the questions as "Has anyone in your household ..." rather than speaking just to the individual responding.

Adam suggested there be a question about their use of early voting. Greg agreed and suggested asking a question like "What best describes your early voting experience: (a) I used early voting and it was convenient; (b) I used early voting and it the hours could have; (c) I would have used early voting if I had heard of it; (d) I would have used early voting if the hours were more convenient; (e) I do not want to use early voting."

Adam returned to the question about lowering the voting age for town elections. There was a lot of back and forth over how to word the question. Jennifer suggested options like “lower the age to 17; lower the age to 16; do not lower the age; unsure.” Adam suggested simplifying it to just “Do you favor lowering the voting age? yes/no.”

Max read back a rough draft of the questions we had arrived at:

Q1. Which of the following options best describes your participation in recent elections?

	Presidential Elections (1)	Statewide Elections (2)	Town Elections (3)
I voted at my polling place. (1)			
I voted early or absentee. (2)			
I did not vote. (3)			

Q2. Have you or a member of your household had difficulty voting due to any of the following:

Location of your polling place. (1)

Parking at your polling place. (2)

Walking distance to your polling place. (3)

Polling place hours were too limited. (4)

Polling place was not sufficiently accessible. (5)

Issues with voting machines. (6)

Early voting days or hours were too limited. (7)

Other (8) _____

Q3. Do you support lowering the voting age for town elections?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Don't Know (3)

Q4. If you voted in recent federal or statewide elections, what best describes your experience with early voting?

I voted early, and I was satisfied with the hours and availability (1)

I voted early, but I would prefer longer hours or additional days. (2)

I did not vote early because the hours or voting days did not work for my schedule. (3)

I did not vote early because I did not know about it. (4)

I did not vote early because I prefer to vote on Election Day (5)

I did not vote early because I voted by absentee or mail ballot. (6)

Q5. Which of the following have you done in the last few years?

Voted in a town election (1)

Spoke with a town meeting member about a local issue (2)

Attended a public meeting or precinct meeting (3)

Greg made a motion that Max and Jennifer form a subcommittee to further refine the questions, discuss them with Envision Arlington, and present them to the committee at the November meeting. Jim seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Consolidation of Races for Open Town Meeting Seats

We then turned our attention to the question of consolidating all Town Meeting Member open seats, regardless of term length, into a single race. Walter asked Greg whether he found the language from Wrentham around the consolidation of open Town Meeting Member seats, regardless of term length, into a single race. He said he hadn't, but that he would like to work on that with Walter before the next meeting.

Jennifer said that eliminating the 1- and 2-year seat races could make it hard to recruit new Town Meeting Members, who are sometimes enticed by the prospect of only a 1- or 2-year commitment. Adam didn't think it would be an issue, because you can tell the prospective member that there's little harm in resigning mid-term, because now we have this great new process for replacing people.

Greg made motion that he and Walter form a subcommittee to work on language for consolidating all open Town Meeting Member seats into a single race.

4. Adjourn

Jim made a motion to adjourn. Adam seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:07pm.